

Lilian Agnes Jones Research Fellowship
Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies
Final Report, Tyler J Stewart, June 2021

Introduction

This research fellowship was originally focused on the idea of “listening to the museum,” which was intended to explore multiple research directions: understanding what sounds exist within the collection; understanding how the museum ‘speaks’ to its community; documenting the sounds produced by and around the museum; understanding the sonic landscape of the Banff area; and most importantly, engaging in critical dialogue around what the Whyte Museum could do to engage in more ethical relations through sound.

When I was awarded this fellowship in November 2020, it seemed as if the Covid-19 global health pandemic was beginning to recede, and that multiple visits for in-person research in Banff would be possible. In reality, the museum has been closed to all public visitation over the past seven months. Given the high case numbers in Alberta (especially in the Banff area), and recommendations against unnecessary travel, many of my location-based research plans were thwarted by the pandemic. Thankfully, a large portion of my research goals have been accomplished thanks to the digitized files within the archives, permitting access to sound recordings (sent via email) that have allowed me to progress with this research fellowship during these trying times. Towards the end of the fellowship, I was fortunate to visit Banff in person in June 2021 as Covid-19 restrictions began to ease after lowered case numbers and increased vaccination rates, permitting me to access many more recordings only available on CD.

Research Overview

Primarily, my research has focused on understanding what sound recordings of Indigenous voices exist within the archives, and what the content of these recordings discuss, in order to understand the Whyte’s (both the museum, and Peter/Catherine) relationship with the Stoney Nakoda peoples. The documented history of Banff and the rocky mountains is replete with tales of European explorers, but less focus has been historically given towards noting the significance of Indigenous peoples and cultural practices within these same spaces. This same discrepancy exists within the Whyte Museum archives, where there are many records (textual, visual, audio) detailing the contributions of European/settler explorers, but much less content outlining Indigenous perspectives.

However, the Whyte Museum’s own discourse frequently outlines the “special relationship” that Peter and Catherine Whyte had with local Indigenous peoples. In listening to sound recordings from the archives, I sought to better understand what exactly this relationship consisted of: which Indigenous peoples did the Whytes interact with, in what situations, under which circumstances, and for what reasons?

It is important to note here that I have focused on examining the sound recordings within the archives, given my own personal research focus on the role sound plays within social relations

and power dynamics. This focus on sound necessarily limits much focus on other evidence (textual, visual) as to how the Whytes (and by extension, the Whyte Museum) interacted/interacts with Indigenous peoples.

The majority of sound recordings of Indigenous peoples within the archives come from personal recordings made by Catherine and Peter Whyte in conversation with Stoney Nakoda individuals, often recorded in their home on the museum grounds. These include conversations with George Maclean (Chief Walking Buffalo), Paul Amos, Chief David Bearspaw (O-zin-ja Thi-ha), Johnny Bearspaw, Frank Kaquitts (Chief Sitting Wind), Tom Kaquitts, Chief Jacob Twoyoungmen (Mîna-wasi-ju), Paul Francis (White Headed Eagle/Ubi Thka), and Noah Goat.

Through the course of the fellowship, I was in contact with the Whyte Museum's manager of Indigenous relationships and programs, Dawn Saunders Dahl. I learned of an ongoing project involving the Nakoda AV Club which involved creating new oral history recordings with Nakoda Elders and knowledge keepers. As this project progressed, questions began to arise around who would have access to these recordings in the future, and where they would be stored. This also brought up questions around who can currently gain access to historical recordings of Nakoda peoples within the Whyte Museum archives, what protocols should exist around accessing these recordings, what purposes these recordings should or should not be permitted to be used for (i.e. exhibitions, audio guides, licensing for other artistic projects or documentaries, etc), and who determines whether or not access should be granted at all to these recordings.

In conversation with Dawn, I decided that in order to build trust and respect with the Nakoda community for any future projects arising from this fellowship, the most ethical decision I could make at this point in my archival research would be to actually stop listening to any other recordings containing Nakoda voices. The history of museums, archives, ethnomusicology, anthropology, and many other fields of research are steeped in practices of appropriation and extraction of Indigenous cultural materials (both tangible and intangible – such as audio recordings) without proper informed consent being attained, or proper considerations being made for what will happen to these cultural materials after they are removed from their communities of origin.

As Dawn continues to work with Nakoda advisors on the development of a Policy to Access Indigenous Materials, I have elected to pause my own listening of any recordings in the Whyte Museum archives which contain Indigenous voices. Once this policy is completed, I can then seek the proper access to listen to further recordings, in the spirit of collaboration and respect – hopefully building this work towards a future exhibitions/programming-related project with the Whyte Museum.

All this said, there were still many other recordings to access within the archives, without transgressing any cultural protocols. Towards the end of the fellowship, I was fortunate to visit Banff in person as Covid-19 restriction began to ease after lowered case numbers and increased vaccination rates. The focus of my research remained the same – to seek a better

understanding of the relationship between Peter and Catherine Whyte and the Stoney Nakoda peoples of the area. Many archival recordings not available in digital format remotely were made available through one week of in-person visits to the archives, which I was very fortunate and grateful to be able to do.

I was also able to visit many “sound-sensitive” areas around Banff during my visit there as part of my research. This was important to me, given Banff’s rich history in presenting or producing sound-related art, such as Janet Cardiff’s first soundwalk (*Forest Walk*, 1991 – a copy of which is in the Whyte Museum collection), Rebecca Belmore’s *Wave Sound* (presented at Lake Minnewanka as part of the Landmarks 2017 program), and works by the esteemed composer Hildegard Westerkamp. Finally, I was also quite grateful to registrar/curatorial assistant Amie Lalonde for opening the Whyte home to me, and providing a brief tour of the residence in which many of the audio files I accessed were actually recorded.

Research Outcomes

To briefly summarize my overall research fellowship, what I found within the sound recordings of the Whyte Museum archives validated previous research that I have been developing – that sound itself is a relational process, not simply the production and reception of physical sound waves. While there have been many instances where sound recordings made by anthropologists (and ethnomusicologists, etc) sought to “extract” knowledge from Indigenous cultures, what I discovered in listening to these archival recordings was a deep desire to build supportive friendships between the Whytes and the Stoney Nakoda people.

Through often very deep and involved conversations, the Whytes recorded the unfolding and development of these relationships – seemingly not for “research” purposes, but merely for their own personal reference, as an extension of their ongoing habits to make many audio recordings of various local events, radio broadcasts, etc. I look forward to better understanding these relationships, along with the knowledge shared in these conversations, through future listening and the possible development of sound-based projects that might activate these recordings for contemporary audiences.

One tangible research outcome at this point was the creation of resources that might be used by Dawn Saunders Dahl and the Nakoda AV Club in support of ongoing projects, namely: 1) a spreadsheet of all audio recordings containing Stoney Nakoda voices, and 2) a list of references that explain and contextualize the Whyte Museum’s original name, given by Chief Walking Buffalo, the “Wa-Che-Yo-Cha-Pa” Foundation. See Appendix A and Appendix B for these resources.

Archival Materials Accessed

A summary of all materials referenced during the fellowship is listed below. Primarily, the S37 recordings were of greatest interest, as this is the series of recordings made by the Whytes themselves. In addition to this list of materials I referenced, please see Appendix A for a list of specific content that can be described to contain Stoney Nakoda voices. This list of materials will be of great value for future research and projects involving the Nakoda AV Club, and for

easier reference by Stoney Nakoda researchers and/or community members who wish to understand what materials exist within the archives that are most relevant to the Nakoda community.

- Peter and Catherine Whyte Fonds
 - S37/ 37, 55-83, 109, 111-112, 116, 138
- Whyte Museum Oral History Programme collection
 - S1/ 83, 135, 152
- John Lee Laurie Fonds
 - S3
- Frank Kaquitts Fonds
 - S4
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Fonds
 - S7/ 1, 5, 10
- Archives General File Collection
 - S8
- Parks Canada Fonds
 - S23/ 2
- Town of Banff Fonds
 - S44
- David Zweifel Fonds
 - S58
- Roy Andersen Fonds
 - S59

Gratitude

I am extremely grateful to the Whyte Museum for this research fellowship and look forward to continuing this productive relationship for years to come. My deepest thanks must be extended to Elizabeth Kundert-Cameron, Lindsay Stokalko, Kate Skelton, Kate Riordon, Amie Lalonde, Anne Ewen, Natalie Dalbecq, and Dawn Saunders Dahl, for assistance both remotely and in-person.